Upper Rio Grande, Basin and Bay
Expert Science Team (Upper BBEST)

Sul Ross State University
Room UC 210, Alpine, TX
August 11 - 12, 2011

MINUTES

Members Present: Ryan Smith, Jeff Bennett, Kevin Urbanczyk, Gary Bryant, and Zhuping Sheng.

Scope of Recommendations

SAC Representative Bob Brandes suggested developing an appropriate environmental flow regime to protect the ecosystem for the Rio Grande segment of interest keeping in mind that it is an international water and new appropriations are not available. He added that developing viable strategies and policy guidelines pertaining to releases from the reservoirs in Mexico would promote bi-national environmental flow goals in future discussions.

HEFR

Mr. Brandes agreed it is appropriate for the Devils and Pecos Rivers, but might not be appropriate for the Rio Grande analysis. SAC Representative Mary Kelly agreed that focusing on release patterns may be more beneficial in the long term to further the process.

In response to member Ryan Smith's concerns, SAC representatives emphasized the SAC's endorsement of the flow regime concept depending on the local circumstances. HEFR is a good starting point but where there is more information available to further understand the flow ecology relationship, that data should be used.

Member Jeff Bennett stated that HEFR provides values for quantitative recommendations. But, by emphasizing the use of other data available results in a flow regime recommendation that includes adaptive management and future strategies.

Members discussed the constraints of the treaty and how it relates to the ultimate recommendation of the BBEST. Members also discussed sound ecological environment and where it may or may not apply.

Budget Update

Mark Wentzel, TWDB, discussed the budget to date, and members were asked to update hours billed.

Task Assignment for FY 11 Expenditures & FY12 Potential Funding

Members discussed the 2011 funds available and possible contracts where it could be applied.

Possible use of the additional funding found from TWDB was discussed and it was reiterated that use for these funds needed to be approved by the TWDB Board by the end of August.

Progress Discussion

Gage Data Compilation Review

Member Ryan Smith presented the spreadsheets on which all the available gage data is compiled. He discussed how the spreadsheets could be used to identify ways to process the data, compare streamflow over the period of record, and view annual summaries.

Hydrosep and HEFR Model Runs

Mr. Smith discussed Rusty Woodburn's work on the basic summary worksheet. The worksheet contains a step by step description of the HEFR model process for future reference.

Members noted that recent measurements at the gage at Pandale indicated that the gage is not working and should not be included in the study.

Ryan Smith talked about the objectives related to flow regime based on cross section analysis/habitat flow relationship and how they relate to the hydrology based HEFR flow regimes. He discussed the functions of the different flow components and resulting overlays to ensure that the baseflow recommendations made are providing suitable aquatic habitat. He warned that use of IHA and HEFR may not be well received by some members of SAC. The Nueces BBEST analysis was presented as an example of the methodology. Concerns were raised with the cost of this approach and the future costs to evaluate whether the flow regime is maintained.

It was decided that the Upper Pecos cross sections planned for Orla and Horsehead Crossing will be done.

Recent Survey Trip

Member Gary Bryant presented pictures from the field work done on the Pecos River and discussed the methodology used for the cross sections. Nine individual habitat types over nine cross sections were made at the Pecos. Due to the braided nature of the stream, more habitat types were required over the nine cross sections completed at Independence Creek. To determine the best range of flows for the next site survey, members suggested using the HEFR run at that gage as a reference.

Sound Ecological Environment

Mr. Bryant proposed, based on the fish data collected, the lower Pecos below Pandale is a sound ecological environment. In this case, sound ecological environment is defined on relatively intact fish populations, good water quality, and the channel is fairly well maintained. Members agreed to document in the report the basis for the "sound" determination. Other segments were tentatively defined as follows:

Upper and middle Pecos - not "sound" based on spring flow and lack of flow.
Rio Grande Lower Canyon – "sound" with "big caveats"
Devils – "sound"

Mr. Smith and Mr. Bennett will work on the definition and send the draft lanugage to the group for input.

Second Day August 12, 2011

Hydrosep Tool Review
BBEST Chair Kevin Urbanczyk explained the input options and resulting hydrographs of the daily summary tab of the hydro-separation tool. He provided members with the electronic copy of the data.

Sound Ecological Environment
Mr. Bennett reviewed the latest draft definition of sound ecological environment including the bullets for each of the criteria members had previously agreed on. Members discussed the "soundness" of the Pecos, Devils, and the Upper Rio Grande between Presidio and Amistad.

Budget
Members discussed the remaining budget and how it should be distributed for the remaining task assignments. Members decided to take the remaining funds allotted to subcommittee work and dedicate to each member $5,000 to pay for their subcommittee/writing duties.

Task Assignments
Members discussed assignments and what needed to completed by the end of the month. They decided that their priority should be the sound ecological environment final language for each sub-basin. Other tasks included:

- Individual field trips (for each basin);
- Draft outline and preamble for final report (Kevin and Zhuping);
- Overviews of the various disciplines;
- Begin general summaries of each discipline for each system.
- Groundwater analysis
- Hydrology Review and Instream flow write up (Kevin);
- Flow component function table;
- Summary literature review

Members discussed how to address groundwater/surface water interaction and will address this topic at a future meeting.

Members discussed the fish data available and how to obtain the data that has already been collected for the habitat analysis. Nolan Raphelt, TWDB, stated he could use the cross sections and data collected recently for the geomorphology overlay analysis.

Mr. Horan noted the SAC's desire to have a single report combining the upper and lower Rio Grande BBEST recommendations. Members agreed that the report include a "Part A" for the Upper Rio Grande and a "Part B" for the Lower Rio Grande.

Set Next Meeting
Members chose to spend time on individual assignments and discuss individual status during a future conference call. A conference call is tentatively scheduled for 2:00 pm on Monday, September 19, 2011. Members will be notified of any changes.

Public Comment
None

Adjourn